

During my teen years I played one, and eventually, two musical instruments. Part of the discipline was “warming up” by playing “scales” in different keys for at least ten to fifteen minutes before setting to work on the particular piece of music. One day I asked my instructor, “What’s the purpose of having to do all these scales?” He replied, “Eventually the scales become part of you that they free you to give yourself over to the music and become one with it.”

Today’s scriptures center around the practice and effect of prayer in our lives.

St. Luke’s gospel is often called the “Gospel of Prayer” since it depicts Jesus at prayer, or speaking about prayer, more often than the other three. From Jesus’ example, we see that prayer, like my instrumental music teacher’s words to me, has as its goal transformation. Prayer’s goal is transforming the one who persists in it into the image and likeness of Jesus into whom we have been baptized as St. Paul reminds us today. Transformed into the likeness of Jesus we are drawn into the heart, the very life of God the Father, so that our words and actions become God’s own.

In instructing us to begin our prayer by calling on God as “Father” Jesus teaches us that through the grace of faith and baptism we have indeed been drawn into his own intimate life with the Father. Is our understanding and relationship to God modeled on the truth of this intimacy, or do we approach God from a owner/employee (even slave) relationship? How would our prayer change if we opened ourselves to the familial intimacy of Jesus?

Jesus then instructs us to pray that God’s kingdom may come. To pray “thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” is to pray to have God’s vision, to see the “big picture” of establishing the reign of God in the world and our life. Is our prayer really about the big picture of God’s plan for our life and the world, as is

and was the vision of Jesus, or is it all about “me” and “my agenda”? Jesus assures us that God stands ready to give us all that we truly need in life; that we should not hesitate to pray for particular gifts for ourselves or others: “Who among you would hand your son a snake when he asks for a fish?” As we pray for the gifts we need, the needs of our family or friends, is our prayer moving us to also pray and act to “feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, welcome the stranger and refugee, exercise wise stewardship over the natural and material resources of creation and human productivity? As we ask, seek and knock at God’s door for our “daily bread” what is our response to those who come to our door?

Finally Jesus gets to the hardest part of prayer—“forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us”. In Abraham’s “bargaining” with God it was Abraham’s, not God’s attitude and action that was changed. Even if there had been only one repentant sinner in Sodom and Gomorrah, God would have spared the city. God’s willingness to forgive goes to the extreme, waits patiently for however long it may take for the return of the sinner and at the slightest gesture or word of repentance rushes in with abundant mercy and forgiveness to set the relationship right once again. What about our practice of forgiveness? How God-like is it? Are we also “slow to anger, full of compassion”, “rich in mercy”, “not counting transgressions”? As I mentioned in my homily on the Fifth Sunday of Lent when we pray “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” do we really want God to judge us by those words and that standard on the day we meet him face to face through death?

Like those scales I played over and over, finally becoming in time, second nature to me freeing me to enter into the heart and soul of music before me, so prayer persistently and consistently practiced day in and day out, is also meant to become “second nature” for us, freeing and drawing us into the heart of God.